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THE TIES THAT BIND

by

Stephen P. Randolph  
Lt Col, USAF

A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY

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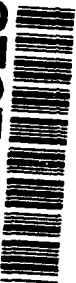
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## ABSTRACT

Title: ROE, Policy, and Military Effectiveness: The Ties That Bind

Author: Stephen P. Randolph, Lt Col, USAF

Rules of Engagement (ROE) are a topic much discussed and little analyzed. They can be the key to a successful implementation of national policy; they can equally be the basis of military disaster. A study of the US military experience in Southeast Asia and Beirut illustrates the relationships among policy, military requirements, legal constraints, public opinion, and the mission that must be balanced to define effective ROE. It also sheds light on the criteria for effective ROE, and on the responsibilities of planners and operators in defining ROE to execute the transition from policy to military action.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Lt Col Stephen P. Randolph (BS, US Air Force Academy, 1974; MA, Johns Hopkins University, 1975) has flown fighter aircraft since 1976, in tours at Ramstein AB, Germany, Luke AFB, AZ, and Bitburg AB, Germany. From 1990 to 1992 he commanded the 22 FS, an F-15 squadron at Bitburg; under his command the unit won the CINCUSAFE Trophy as the outstanding fighter squadron in the command for 1990.

Lt Col Randolph deployed to Al Kharj, Saudi Arabia, in February 1991, and flew fourteen combat missions in operation Desert Storm. He commanded the F-15 unit establishing the postwar residual force, as it executed the transition from combat to peacetime operations and rules of engagement.

In his one staff tour to date, Lt Col Randolph served as an action officer in the DCS/Plans and Operations at the Air Staff from 1985 to 1987, and then as a member of the Chief of Staff's Staff Group from 1987 to 1989.

*Despite the great variety and development of modern war its major lines are still laid down by governments; in other words, if we are to be technical about it, by a purely political and not a military body. That is as it should be. -- Clausewitz*

Through the Cold War, American military action has been carefully governed by political considerations. That harnessing of military force has been done well on some occasions, very poorly on others.

The rules of engagement (ROE) under which forces employ comprise one principal means by which policy is translated into military action. ROE have received their share of attention over the last few years. Every military disaster of the past decade -- from the terrorist bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut, to the *Stark* incident in which an Exocet slammed into a USN ship, to the *Vincennes* tragedy in which an American warship shot down a civilian airliner -- has resulted in intense, though unsystematic and short-lived, popular attention to the ROE under which those forces were employed.

The professional press has likewise paid some attention to ROE, with the attention in the past coming primarily from the naval services. That difference in focus has been a natural result of the respective roles of the services in the postwar military. The Navy and the Marine Corps have been expeditionary forces, frequently used in situations requiring military force short of war. They have suffered casualties, and failed, on occasion, to meet their mission requirements, because of failures to define effective ROE, or to execute those defined. As the role of the Air Force evolves, Air Force officers will increasingly face the sorts of ambiguous, lethal situations that naval task force commanders have faced for the past five decades -- witness, for example, Provide Comfort and Southern Watch, two operations short of war, full of political complexity, where lethal force has

recently been employed.

A historical view of ROE clarifies the crucial relationships among policy, ROE, and military action, and illuminates some of the critical errors in our past experience. The examples that follow -- from the air war in Southeast Asia and the Beirut peacekeeping mission of 1982-83 -- offer the full range of ROE options, and a rich, expensive vein of lessons learned. They were selected for those reasons, and because ROE for more recent actions remain classified.

#### I. ROE: Their Definition and Their Role

Through rules of engagement, the national command authority (NCA) reaches into every fighter cockpit, every infantry platoon, every operational staff agency across the U.S. military. The Department of Defense defines ROE as "directives that a government may establish to delineate the circumstances and limitations under which its own naval, ground, and air forces will initiate and/or continue combat engagement with enemy forces" (17: 7). ROE apply in day-to-day peacetime operations, through all levels of crisis and confrontation, and in fullscale war.

Across that spectrum of policy situations, ROE exist for one purpose: to translate policy objectives into military activity. They seek to harness the deadly force of military action toward achieving rational policy ends. They will therefore limit military options in exactly the same way that political considerations are at odds with classically military criteria for action. Political objectives of crisis management, with its classic "toolbox" of signals, graduated pressure, and so on, will require military action to be overt, deliberate, and measured, leaving the adversary a graceful path to deescalation of the crisis. By contrast, purely military considerations, particularly in air warfare, call for action that is rapid and lethal, leaving



the adversary stunned and without effective recourse. Thus, peacetime ROE can, in times of crisis, leave military forces in an uncomfortably vulnerable position (14: 226-227).

It is of vital importance, however, to separate the ROE from the policies which they are meant to implement. The national command authorities task military actions in support of policy goals, and establish limits on military force to achieve those goals. Those limitations are then translated into specific military employment parameters through the ROE. It is quite possible, in fact frequently done, to have an ill-considered policy implemented through effective ROE -- defined as ROE which accurately and effectively translate policy guidance into military terms. It is equally possible to have an ill-considered policy implemented through poor ROE -- defined as ROE which inadequately translate policy into military action. In the case of the crisis management scenarios noted above, it is not the ROE, but the policy underlying the ROE, which is increasing the vulnerability and decreasing the lethality of air forces. The ROE merely implement a policy, and may do so either well or poorly. While this may seem a distinction without a difference, maintaining this distinction permits military planners to focus on the different tasks necessary in building these ties that bind policy formulation to military action.

With the transition to open hostilities, ROE defined for operational purposes will supplement those defined for military-political purposes. Those additional purposes will include limiting fratricide, reducing the incidence of short rounds, and reducing casualty rates through imposition of operational restrictions on tactics. Finally, they will be used to keep military operations within the bounds of the laws of war, and the perceived limits set by world and domestic public opinion (19: 25-41).

In harnessing military activity to its political objectives, ROE may define hostile criteria, thus limiting who may be attacked and under what

circumstances; they may govern the pace and weight of effort of military action; they may define the geographic limits of operation; they may govern the type of ordnance, who may task and authorize military operations, and which targets within the threat array are authorized for strike. In short, any and all aspects of military operations can be seen to have policy implications, and thus be subject to restraint through ROE. (10:121)

ROE are defined for standing peacetime operations by the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), who in the early 1980s developed a "playbook" which offers standardized phrases for ROE development. Contingency plans and operations supplement those with supporting ROE more specifically adopted to the objectives and environment; these are defined by the unified commander for approval by the JCS. Operational commanders, finally, are permitted to propose modifications to these ROE, and further restrict subordinate commands as required to achieve mission objectives at reasonable loss rates (17: 10-13). Prior to this structure there was no standard format for ROE, which were developed for individual operations or plans, and varied across the different unified commands.

## II. The Air War in Southeast Asia

The tension among the military, political, and legal considerations defining ROE may never be more intense than was the case in the air war in Southeast Asia. Through much of that war, from 1964 to 1968, there persisted an insurmountable barrier between the national civilian leadership and the nation's military leaders over the proper objectives and conduct of Rolling Thunder, the air war over North Vietnam. At the time and later, that conflict has resulted in volumes -- all critical -- written about the ROE under which US forces fought the air war.

The conflict over ROE originated in a deep disagreement over what was

politically and militarily achievable through air attack of North Vietnam (NVN). The Secretary of Defense, Robert S. McNamara, believed that adversary forces in South Vietnam were largely independent of northern support, and that US air operations were incapable of effectively interdicting the flow of supplies to those forces. But those operations, in his view ultimately of limited value from a military perspective, offered the prospect of inciting direct Russian or Chinese armed support of Vietnam -- thus raising the specter of a nuclear confrontation or of Chinese intervention. The air war over the North further created the perception of the world's richest and most advanced nation prosecuting an aerial bombardment of one of the world's poorest nations -- fertile grounds for a public-relations disaster that could have dramatic domestic and international effects. This last aspect of the air war generated a deep and abiding concern that the bombing remain clearly within the laws of war, and demonstrate restraint and a visible concern to limit civilian casualties (20: 47-48).

The JCS, conversely, regarded the bombing of the North as a means of achieving a military solution to the war in the south -- by cutting off the forces operating there, and by eliminating the North's war-supporting industries and infrastructure. Recurrently through the course of Rolling Thunder, the JCS recommended a more aggressive bombing campaign than was permitted, mirroring the objectives for the air war proposed by the JCS at its outset in 1965: disrupt and attrit external support for North Vietnam; disrupt the war-making potential of NVN; and limit the southbound flow of supplies to SVN through interdiction of the roads, waterways, and railroads leading into South Vietnam.

Secretary McNamara rejected that advice, and defined narrowly limited, and highly political, objectives, for the extended aerial campaign over the North: to raise the cost to the North and its supporting states of supplying the Vietcong; to strengthen South Vietnamese morale; and to impose a price

on North Vietnam for its support of the war in the south (8: 56-76). These general objectives stood for the course of the Rolling Thunder campaign, and generated the ROE governing the use of force over North Vietnam. These ROE, recently declassified after the passage of twenty years, may now be discussed in detail for the first time.

ROE initially restricted strikes to targets below 20<sup>0</sup>N latitude, and prohibited reattacks on targets. South Vietnamese participation was mandatory for all strikes. Air attacks were to be conducted by armed reconnaissance along authorized routes, with attacks on strategic targets - all of which were assigned JCS target numbers -- authorized only on specific JCS direction. Target selection for these strategic targets was decided at the presidential level, as was the number of sorties to be placed against each target. Attacks against unauthorized targets, to include the anti-aircraft network under construction in northeastern North Vietnam, were prohibited.

Gradually the strikes were extended northward, South Vietnamese participation was dropped, and target lists were published weekly, instead of on a strike-by-strike basis. By June 1966, strikes were being performed in the Hanoi-Haiphong areas, and the following operating restrictions were in place (31: 51-56):

- Imposition of a 30-mile buffer zone on the Chinese border westward from the 106<sup>0</sup> line, and 25 miles east of that line;
- A thirty mile restricted area around Hanoi, with a ten mile prohibited area, and a ten mile restricted area around Haiphong;
- No attacks against JCS-numbered targets, unless authorized by the JCS. Previously authorized targets were approved for strike in conjunction

with armed reconnaissance missions;

- U.S. aircraft were prohibited from attacking North Vietnamese airfields, even in hot pursuit of North Vietnamese aircraft; later some airfields were approved for attack, but the level of attack initially was capped at eight aircraft to limit the damage inflicted to harassment and attrition of enemy aircraft;

- "Extreme caution" was to be exercised in conducting air strikes so as not to endanger foreign shipping; in the Haiphong area, "every feasible precaution" was to be taken in conducting air strikes, including SAM suppression, to avoid endangering foreign shipping and to minimize civilian casualties and collateral damage;

- Attacks on populated areas, locks and dams, sampans, religious shrines, hospitals, barracks, and hydroelectric plants were prohibited;

- "In the interest of obviating charges of escalation, either from foreign or domestic sources, the following additional authorities were to be exercised in a measured manner: attacks on newly authorized Rolling Thunder targets were to be scheduled at the rate of no more than three per day, and concentration of armed reconnaissance effort within the 30 mile Hanoi restricted area was to be avoided (31: 55)."

- Attacks on naval craft north of 20°21'N was authorized only if those craft were within the three-mile limit, were clearly identified as NVN naval vessels, and fired first at U.S. aircraft;

- In the air-to-air arena, attacks were permitted only after visual identification of the target aircraft, and only on fighter aircraft -- transports, helicopters and passenger aircraft were exempt from attack.

These limitations were defined through an extended hierarchy of standing instructions. Annual Rolling Thunder Operating Orders published by CINCPAC in 1965, 1966, 1967, and 1968, transmitted JCS-defined restrictions; these were supplemented by Operating Rules published by 7AF. These basic ROE could be modified for individual Rolling Thunder operations, with modifications specified in the execute orders. For instance, the execute order for attacks on oil storage facilities in the Haiphong area, conducted in June 1966, specified that aircrews were to exercise "extreme caution" to avoid damage to merchant shipping; attack only positively identified North Vietnamese ships, and then only in retaliation for AAA fire; avoid attacking piers if a ship was berthed there; and minimize civilian casualties through extensive use of electronic countermeasures and through executing visual bombing only (31: 5).

Leaving aside for the moment the issue of the wisdom of the policy at work, we can assess the ROEs' effectiveness in implementing that policy. In general, as has been noted of the Vietnamese war in another context, the irony of this system is that in one sense it worked: national policy was implemented effectively through the ROE imposed on the air war. The graduated air campaign did step up the pressure on North Vietnam, though never to the maximum extent possible given the force structure and technology available at the time; and it did increase the cost to the enemy of supporting the ground war in the south. The restriction on attacking ports minimized the prospects of third-country involvement, as did the prohibition on attacking North Vietnamese SAM sites; the major fear in both cases is that Russian citizens or advisors would be killed. The careful distribution of the air strikes accomplished, as much as possible, the signalling required of coercive diplomacy. Bombing was done within the laws of war, and with a constant view toward the public opinion at work, at home and abroad.

Several aspects of these ROE deserve closer examination. First, any ROE represent a balance of the military, political, and legal issues at work. The remarkable aspect of the Rolling Thunder ROE is that it so heavily weighted the political component of the air war, at the expense of the military. Given the expectations noted above on the part of the Secretary of Defense, that weighting is understandable. His belief that the war was unwinnable through air action made that balance inevitable -- though there has been contention ever since that this belief was a self-fulfilling prophecy, and not an accurate reflection of the capabilities this nation had on hand.

Second, the ROE displayed a pronounced disregard for the vulnerability of American forces on the field of combat. This tendency can be seen at the tactical level -- for example, in the restriction against firing on ship-borne AAA until the AAA had fired first -- and at the operational/strategic level, in the prohibition of attacks on the SAM network as it was under construction in the first half of 1965. It is worth noting that this was the first major exposure of U.S. forces to SAMs, though several U-2s had been killed by SA-2s of the type being incorporated into the North Vietnamese defense network. Intelligence expectations at the time were that this system would have about a 60% chance of killing its target on any given launch, and at that time there existed no electronic or tactical countermeasures to the system. A statement by Secretary McNamara before the Senate Armed Forces Committee in January 1967 clearly defines the contrast between current, and Vietnam-era attitudes toward combat losses:

The statement that we are losing men and equipment in the air war in fairly high quantities, I think, overstates the case. We lost twelve aircraft over North Vietnam in the month of December. While we begrudge the loss of every single man and every single airplane, we do pick up about half the pilots (20: 47-48).

At the time of this testimony, U.S. air forces had already lost over 480

aircraft over North Vietnam, with heavier losses projected over the coming months.

This willingness to accept casualties, which seems remarkable in post-Gulf War America, was not restricted to the civilian leadership. Air Force leaders at the national and the tactical levels alike were willing to accept high risks to achieve even the limited goals possible under existing limitations; Going Downtown, for example, offers a long series of examples of flight leads accepting high levels of risk to achieve limited results. In part this was a function of the training and equipment of the period; it was necessary to expose forces, often repeatedly, to enemy defenses to achieve worthwhile damage.

Given the overwhelming combat power of U.S. air forces at the time, the losses never directly affected the delivery of ordnance on the enemy. There was never any period at which it appeared that U.S. air operations might be denied due to enemy air defense capability. However, the restrictions imposed on U.S. forces, and the vulnerability imposed by those restrictions, had corrosive effects on the morale of U.S. air forces of all services, creating the spectacles of a vice wing commander of an F-105 wing publicly attacking the Air Force's senior leadership, and of senior military leaders, likewise, attacking Secretary MacNamara's direction of the war in the Senate Armed Services Committee's Stennis hearings at the height of the war. Those incidents ultimately reflected deep schisms within the military, with combat aviators believing that they were unsupported by their leadership, and senior leaders believing that their expertise was not valued by the national command authority.

Finally, the perception that political restrictions were causing U.S. casualties cost the NCA support from conservatives who might otherwise have been expected to fully support an American war effort (20: 48). Then,



as now, the center of gravity for any major U.S. military operation is the support of the home front. The ROE eroded that support in Southeast Asia.

The third major characteristic of these ROE was their extreme care to keep air operations within the bounds of international law, and to sustain a public perception that air operations were being executed with constant care to limit civilian casualties. The extreme sensitivity of American leadership to charges that they were attacking civilian populations led, throughout the air war, to extraordinary measures designed to reduce civilian casualties and property damage.

By the laws of war, the responsibility of the United States in executing its campaign was to refrain from deliberately targeting civilians; North Vietnam carried an equal responsibility to protect its people from attack through evacuation and civil defense measures (19: 32-38). NVN took full advantage of American sensitivities, both for public relations and military gain, in placing key military supplies and installations in populated areas to shield them from attack -- a violation of the laws of war, but a move yielding high military and political payoffs. The United States forfeited a great deal of targeting flexibility, without gaining anything in the public affairs battle; those who opposed the bombing did so regardless of U.S. claims of restraint.

The military effects of these ROE were dramatic. The gradual buildup of the campaign, and the objectives of the targeting process, precluded execution of an effective air campaign. The NVN received the advantage of geographic and temporal constraints. Air operations were channelized by restrictions in operating areas, and rendered predictable by specifications on the weight and timing of strikes.

It bears emphasis, however, that not all limitations to operational effectiveness and flexibility were politically defined. The forces executing

these operations brought their own inflexibility and overcentralization to the war, amply documented in the histories of those campaigns -- as Col. Broughton wrote, CINCPACAF Gen. Jack Ryan "ruled the air war in the Pacific and he and his staff controlled all air operations to the most minute detail. The common complaint about PACAF headquarters was its detachment and lack of current professional knowledge. The majority of that staff were not familiar with the operational equipment..."(3: 146). The JCS-defined division of North Vietnam into route packages in and of itself prohibited the execution of an air campaign, as now conceived; shortfalls in training, doctrine, and equipment all contributed to the inability of the air campaign to have greater effect on the enemy.

### III. Vietnamese Air Operations Post-Rolling Thunder

President Johnson restricted Rolling Thunder to targets below 19<sup>0</sup>N latitude in April 1968, and suspended offensive operations over NVN in November 1968. Over the next three years, U.S. forces executed only reconnaissance missions over southern North Vietnam, delivering ordnance only in direct response to attack by North Vietnamese forces or when tasked for specific air operations.

Over time, North Vietnam deployed antiaircraft defenses southward to threaten air operations in Laos, and North Vietnamese defenses attained new technical sophistication. The NVN moved AAA batteries into Laos and southern North Vietnam, moved surface-to-air missiles into the area, and developed advanced tactics for employing these weapons. Migs occasionally stationed through fields in southern North Vietnam in hopes of ambushing a B-52, C-130, or RC-135. Losses mounted in operations over Laos. The "protective reaction" ROE seemed indefensibly restrictive to operators facing this upgraded antiaircraft network. The situation was reported through the chain of command, with requests for changes in the ROE. These

were denied (27:10-12).

Finally, in November 1971, 7AF commander Gen. Jack Lavelle ordered the first major challenge to JCS-level operating authorities. Lavelle tasked about twenty missions against NVN antiaircraft systems and airfields in violation of the ROE, feeling, as he stated in testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, that "I felt I had a moral responsibility to the crews who were daily ordered to fly over the Ho Chi Minh trail to destroy the missiles moving into positions from which they could destroy our aircraft and crews, and this we did (27: 27)." He then attempted to cover up the attacks through false reporting of strike tasking and results. He was relieved from command and retired as a major general (32: 40-46).

Four months later the North Vietnamese launched a massive offensive, seeking to achieve, finally, the military victory they had so long sought. President Nixon responded by ordering the air offensives Freedom Train, which opened in April 1972, and its successor Linebacker, initiated the following month. These campaigns were characterized by an entirely different operating philosophy and policy from preceeding air operations over North Vietnam: air war was to be used to inflict defeat on the enemy, and not send signals to him. With that policy came a general relaxation of ROE, permitting vastly increased operational flexibility to 7AF and TF77 planners. Major changes from the ROE for Rolling Thunder included:

- Restrictions around Hanoi and Haiphong were reduced to a ten-mile restricted area around the center of each city, which could be transited if operationally necessary;

- Only targets within the Chinese buffer zone and Hanoi/Haiphong restricted areas, and special category targets, required JCS approval; otherwise targets could be struck on CINCPAC direction. In October 1972, penetration of the Chinese buffer zone was authorized for strikes on JCS-

authorized targets, and in hot pursuit of NVN aircraft;

- Military airfields could be attacked except those where third nation aircraft were present;

- No restrictions were imposed on the weight or pace of operations against authorized targets (32: 51-56).

These operations were designed to punish North Vietnam, and to significantly affect its ability to make war. The contrast in ROE between Linebacker and Rolling Thunder clearly marks that fundamental change by national policymakers. They reduced geographic restrictions in both the Hanoi-Haiphong zone and along the Chinese border; major target sets such as ports and airfields were released for attack without significant restriction; and, most significantly, targetting and mission planning were left to operational commanders. These commanders gained the flexibility to conduct an integrated, sequential operation, weighted as necessary to achieve necessary damage to target systems.

The operational effectiveness of the Linebacker campaigns has been often noted. It should be emphasized that their success owed as much to the advent of precision-guided weapons and advanced training programs, as it did to the relaxation of restrictions on air attacks. The combination of these operational and policy changes enabled U.S. air forces to conduct something of a Desert Storm-level campaign, over two decades ago.

#### IV. The Air War in Laos

Air operations in Laos were even more complex than those occurring in North Vietnam. Laos encompassed two separate operating theaters, each with its own military-political logic. In the north, the North Vietnamese

backed the Pathet Lao insurgency in a ground war against government forces. As the war matured, U.S. air forces aided government forces with the full range of tactical missions. In southern Laos there was no land war and no insurgency; that area was completely under the control of the North Vietnamese operating the infiltration routes into South Vietnam (30: 16-17).

As the air war matured, USAF and USN air forces conducted separate air operations in those two areas, Steel Tiger in the south and Barrel Roll in the north, with separate rules of engagement and operational objectives (30: 17). Air operations in Laos were further defined by the covert nature of the war, as U.S. forces attempted to stay in at least nominal accord with the Geneva agreement of 1962 calling for a neutral and demilitarized Laos. And finally, U.S. forces were constrained by the requirement to sustain public support for their ally, Souvanna Phouma. The diplomatic delicacy of operations there required ROE for both air operations to be defined jointly by CINCPAC and the American Embassy in Vientiane, these ROE being further supplemented by operating rules issued by 7AF. Throughout the war in Laos, ROE were constantly in flux as military and political considerations competed for priority.

The war in Laos, like all campaigns in the Southeast Asia war, opened tentatively, with intermittent reconnaissance missions in late 1964 under operation Yankee Team. Early losses to ground fire led the JCS to restrict air operations to 10,000' and higher in late November. Aircraft operating at medium level were authorized to return hostile fire only if it endangered them; any low-level operations required specific JCS approval. In most areas, aircraft could deliver ordnance only in response to hostile fire; in known high-threat areas, suppressive fire was permitted, but such suppressive fire was authorized only with JCS approval and ambassadorial coordination (30: 29-38).

The active interdiction campaign, Barrel Roll, opened on December 14, 1964. The very first mission received "real-time" critique from U.S. Ambassador Sullivan on 18 December, with a telegraph to the Secretary of State complaining that the targets struck had not been genuine targets of opportunity, and that friendly structures appeared to have received damage (30: 49-50). Initially, armed reconnaissance missions were to be flown no more than once every 72 hours and use no more than four aircraft from non-Thai bases (30: 51).

The JCS eventually relaxed these restrictions as the campaign matured. By 1966, Laos had been divided into the two major operating zones noted above, and further subdivided into a total of seven armed reconnaissance routes. A series of short-round incidents resulting in civilian casualties generated a major restructuring of the operational airspace in March 1967. The Steel Tiger operating zone was divided into four narrow north-south strips, with control over strikes becoming progressively stricter the farther west one operated. The strip along the eastern border was essentially a free-fire zone, while in the western portion of the country, aircraft delivering ordnance were required to be under the control of an American forward air controller and have their position radar-confirmed before beginning operations. In addition, a series of special airspace categories were implemented -- Raven Corridors and Special Operating Airspace -- to facilitate strikes into known hostile airspace, or impose further restrictions on areas where friendlies were known to be operating.

By late 1968 a graphic display of the rules of engagement for Laos required a three-dimensional 8x7x7 matrix defining the operational area, activity, and approval level (31: 25). As a contemporary Air Force history for this period summarized the situation:

In October 1968, the Air Attache in Vientiane issued a list of rules and restrictions pertaining to the Barrel Roll area.

This list highlighted the complexity which had crept into the Rules of Engagement. JCS-imposed restrictions included those against operating in BR areas within 10 NM of the NVN border, armed reconnaissance on certain designated routes, COLLEGE EYE, hot pursuit, air operations adjacent to the ChiCom border, and ARC LIGHT. The AmEmb, Vientiane, controlled ordnance, target validations, PW camp restrictions, defoliation, and ground and Raven FAC operations. Seventh Air Force imposed tactical AF release altitude restrictions for high threat areas, and command and control procedures governing Laos strikes (28: 27).

That this system was complex and cumbersome needs no emphasis. In 1969 the airspace was once again restructured to simplify air operations. The Barrel Roll area was "rezoned" into three areas -- the northern area along the Chinese border essentially a buffer zone, eastern Laos a free-fire zone along lines of communications, the western zone requiring forward air controllers for ordnance delivery. The four Steel Tiger zones were compressed into two (31: 30-35). That structure, with innumerable minor adjustments to facilitate support for ground operations, stood for the rest of the war.

Beyond these armed reconnaissance areas, the ROE demanded validation of fixed targets, to avoid attacks on friendly villages, hospitals, shrines and the like. Attack on these targets therefore required approval from the American Embassy in Vientiane. The nomination-approval cycle for strikes required about sixteen days -- as noted in the official history, "hardly optimum for guerilla warfare" (31: 26).

To summarize the air war in Laos: once again, the tension between military and policy considerations stayed at a high level across a campaign lasting for years. Because the public attention paid to the war and the risk of third-party involvement were much lower than in the war in the North, ROE in Laos were somewhat more flexible and less restrictive, and showed

less tendency to safeguard policy by increasing the risks to aircrew.

Beyond the lessons noted earlier in the case of the Vietnamese air war, there was a self-defeating complexity in the ROE in Laos that created nearly inevitable violations, at significant political cost. Violations would in turn generate more restrictions, which would add to the complexity still further, and so on. The ROE satisfied the written criteria for effective control over military operations; but since the rules were beyond the technical capability of the equipment used at the time, particularly under the stress of combat, the rules yielded policymakers a sense of control while denying the reality. Finally, the coordination cycle constructed to ensure proper civilian validation of military targets directly destroyed much of the value of the bombing.

#### V. Beirut, 1982-83

American experience in Beirut during the early 1980s yielded some dearly-bought, but extremely valuable, lessons on the formulation and execution of ROE under politically-ambiguous "peacetime" scenarios.

On 29 September 1982, the 1,200-man 32d Marine Amphibious Unit began landing in Beirut, part of a multinational peacekeeping force deployed to that city. The JCS Alert Order directed the unit to "...establish an environment which will permit the Lebanese Armed Forces to carry out their responsibilities in the Beirut area. When directed, USCINCEUR will introduce U.S. forces as part of a multinational force presence in the Beirut area..." That alert order further specified that the Marines would not be engaged in combat; that peacetime rules of engagement would apply; and that USCINCEUR would be prepared to withdraw U.S. forces from Beirut in the event of hostile action (38: 35).



The Marine force was considered a major component of the multinational "presence" stabilizing the violent, confused political situation in Lebanon subsequent to the Israeli invasion and the subsequent breakdown of national authority. A series of armed factions contested Israeli and national Lebanese forces, fragmenting the nation and leading to atrocities committed on all sides. The Italian, French, and American forces committed to this peacekeeping operation were generally welcomed by the Lebanese, as a neutral, stabilizing force that might permit them to find a long-term political solution to be found (38:46).

The Marines occupied positions in the vicinity of Beirut International Airport (BIA), between Israeli forces and the city of Beirut. There they remained over the following thirteen months, as the political situation grew more confused and the military threat increased. Gradually, and under the detailed direction of policymakers in Washington, the U.S. role in Lebanon evolved from one of impartiality, to a clear and obvious favoring of one major combatant at the expense of other factions. Initially deployed to maintain an impartial "presence" separating combatants, the U.S. forces eventually exchanged artillery fire with militia forces, called in naval gunfire to support LAF operations, and conducted an emergency resupply of tanks and artillery to the Lebanese Army.

On 23 October 1983, a suicide truck bomb blew up the Battalion Landing Team Headquarters building in the Marine compound at the airport, killing 241 Marines and wounding about 100 more. Another bomb, nearly simultaneous, exploded at the French forces' headquarters, killing another 57 people.

In the wake of this disaster, President Reagan directed that a commission be convened to study the sequence of events. The resulting Long Commission report appeared within two months. Its major findings starkly illustrate the inseparable relationships among policy, operational

environment, mission, and ROE, and the consequences of failing to correlate them.

The JCS-defined mission statement for the U.S. force was promulgated by USCINCEUR with little amplification, through the six levels of command to the Marine forces executing the mission. That mission was not commonly understood at all levels of command. Specifically, the responsibility of U.S. forces for the security of Beirut International Airport was not specified in the alert order, but was generally understood to be critical to the credibility of the multinational force; and there was, similarly, no common understanding of the requirements of the "presence" mission, the permissible degree of risk in executing it, or the amount of force considered appropriate in its execution (38:37-38).

The mission was not simply unclear; it had effectively changed over time, without any corresponding change to the mission statement or ROE. The NCA had committed the multinational force in a non-combatant role, with the understanding that its protection would be assured by the Lebanese government. That protection was to encompass both physical protection, and the securing of assurances from the various factions that the MNF would not be attacked. The mission, thus, was expected to be conducted within a benign environment. It was, in addition, expected to last only 60 days, and perhaps most significantly, the MNF was expected to be viewed by the warring factions as a neutral force (38:39-46).

As the Long Commission report summarized:

It is abundantly clear that by late summer 1983, the environment in Lebanon changed to the extent that the conditions upon which the USMNF mission was initially premised no longer existed. The Commission believes that appropriate guidance and modification of the tasking should

have been provided to the USMNF to enable it to cope effectively with the increasingly hostile environment. (38:41)

Given those profound changes in mission and threat environment, a major change, or at least a focused review, of ROE was imperative to the success and survival of the soldiers in Beirut. None occurred.

JCS direction to USCINCEUR specified that U.S. forces were to operate under normal peacetime ROE. Force was to be used only when required for self-defense of Marine units against a hostile threat or hostile act, or in defense of a Lebanese Army unit operating with the Marines.

USCINCEUR provided additional ROE guidance: reprisals or punitive measures were forbidden, and American forces were directed to seek guidance from higher authority prior to using armed force in self-defense except in an emergency. USCINCEUR guidance defined "hostile force" and "hostile act," but not "hostile threat." U.S. forces were not authorized to use force against intruders unless the intruder committed a hostile act.

In implementing these ROE, the local commander, Col. Tim Geraghty, directed that "weapons will be on safe, with no rounds in the chamber...Do not chamber a round unless instructed to do so by a commissioned officer unless you must act in immediate self-defense where deadly force is authorized." This decision reflected his concern for accidental discharge of a weapon; it distills the conflict between political concern and military considerations that shaped the course of events in Beirut. The commander recognized, obviously, that this restriction reduced his security forces' ability to react to a threat, but was willing to accept that risk to protect his ability to execute and sustain his "presence" mission.

These ROE remained stable for the forces executing the peacekeeping mission. They were supplemented by a second set promulgated for the

mission of securing the British Embassy and Durraffourd Building after the Marines assumed that responsibility. From mid-April until the bombing in mid-October, the American forces in Beirut operated under dual ROE, depending upon which mission they were performing: peacekeeping duties, or embassy security. Onscene commanders were careful to ensure that soldiers moving from one duty to the other, and one set of ROE to the other, would have the training to comply with the ROE applicable to their mission. This responsibility they met by providing white ROE cards for those executing the peacekeeping mission, and blue for those securing the embassy facilities. As the Long Commission noted, "Those ROE used by the Embassy security detail were designed to counter the terrorist threat posed by both vehicles and personnel. Marines on similar duty at BIA, however, did not have the same ROE to provide them specific guidance and authority to respond to a vehicle or person moving through a perimeter. Their 'White Card' ROE required them to call local forces to assist in all self-defense efforts."

Two other issues, both identified by the investigating commission, complete this discussion of the Beirut tragedy. First, in the wake of the bombing it became evident that the levels of command involved in this deployment shared no common understanding of the ROE. On the day following the explosion, the naval task force commander requested a change to the rules, specifically permitting Marine forces to fire upon vehicles speeding toward Marine positions. A month later a second request for expansion of the ROE followed, this time asking for clearance for Marines to fire, without warning if necessary, on vehicles attempting unauthorized access to friendly positions. USCINCEUR denied both requests, on the grounds that these authorities were implicit in the original ROE (38:50).

Finally, the Long Commission criticized the published ROE as being insufficiently specific in defining "hostile threat." That gap in guidance ultimately reflected the lack of focus on the increasing threat that

terrorism posed to the Marine forces. Despite the car bombing of the US Embassy, military members at all levels of command remained focussed on the conventional threat to the Marine forces. That threat was certainly high, as witnessed by the casualties inflicted by sniper, artillery, and grenades; but the incidence of car bombs in the Middle East at the time, and a lethal use of that weapon against US personnel at the embassy, should have resulted in a reprioritization of security measures to guard against such an attack on BIA. A specific definition of "hostile threat" would possibly have increased command awareness of the threat, and the Marines' capability to respond to such an attack. Thus, as the Commission pointed out, the ROE failed to give effective guidance on the threat, and failed equally to give local commanders and soldiers the authority to deal with a threat. The combination of a lack of guidance and a lack of flexibility proved lethal (38:50).

The Beirut experience has largely escaped the attention of Air Force historians, for obvious reasons: no Air Force personnel were involved, and the action was entirely naval and ground-based. Still, the tortuous sequence of events that led to the death of so many soldiers and the failure of a major US policy initiative, deserves study. Extended "peacekeeping" deployments in politically unsettled, militarily threatening situations are not beyond the bounds of the possible in the mid-1990s. The same failures to adjust the ROE to changes in the threat over time, or to adjust the stated policy to match the situation as it exists on the ground, could affect air forces as easily, and as lethally, as they did the Marines in Beirut.

## VI. Epilogue and Conclusions

What lessons do we learn from this extensive experience, in Southeast Asia and later? First off, ROE must be a logical extension of the national policy at work, and of the operational environment. When either of those

change significantly, ROE need review. Whatever one might think of national policy in Southeast Asia, it was at least clearly transmitted in the ROE; these were specific, well suited to meeting the direction of policy, and carefully implemented. Later actions, as in Beirut, demonstrate that an unclear policy or strategy will have, as one clear symptom, unclear ROE.

Established ROE should be technologically feasible within the operational environment, and under the stress and uncertainty of high-tempo operations. On occasion policymakers seek to impose an exquisite level of control on military operations, and end up deluding themselves that they are controlling events when, in fact, events are controlling them. Ultimately it is the man pulling the trigger who decides when force is to be applied; the guidance given him must be clear, simple, and executable if his acts are to support policy effectively.

From a military perspective, and indirectly from a political one as well, ROE that add to the vulnerability of operating forces in wartime are inadvisable. They will, in modern America, erode support for the war effort, and in an extreme case can lead to the temptation for deliberate violation and deception on the part of military men. It is a tremendous testimonial to the men of the armed forces during the Vietnamese War, that so few deliberate violations of the ROE were recorded.

It was no anomaly in Southeast Asia for political limitations to intrude on the air war. Political limitations will by definition restrict the effectiveness of all future air operations. Clausewitz's "clash of forces freely operating and obeying no law but their own" is, as he emphasized, a fiction. Air operations are, by their nature, the type of military employment most crippled by those limitations; nonetheless, given the lethality and effectiveness of the air weapon, careful control of its employment will continue to be seen as crucial to policy implementation. The degree of limitation will depend on the scope of the conflict, the political

circumstances surrounding it, and the military threat. Rarely will air activity be as unconstrained as in Desert Storm -- much though air warriors might wish. It is the responsibility of those with expertise in employing this tool of national policy to ensure that constraints do not prohibit mission accomplishment, that their effects are clearly understood and articulated to those establishing policy, and that the policy decisions arrived at, are implemented through ROE that translate the policy clearly into the terms of military operations. Finally, the major source of ill with ROE over past decades has been a failure to update ROE as necessary to ensure they support the mission as conditions change. This is a responsibility of the chain of command.

Like all aspects of military preparedness, this set of requirements permits peacetime preparation: "the more you sweat in peace, the less you bleed in war." The Air Force can should structure its doctrine and training to practice disseminating and complying with higher-level restrictions to operations. The Navy has long conducted ROE exercises in port and on cruise, to ensure that the entire chain of command understands the limitations they are operating under, and actions permissible under different scenarios. Similar training will be useful to Air Force forces deploying, for example, to enforce a cease-fire in Bosnia. Attention to ROE formulation in the service schools would raise awareness of the issue and of the sensitivities involved in ROE formulation.

The Air Force has focussed for two decades on high-intensity warfare, with relatively simple and stable ROE. In this new era, it is imperative that we train our staffs and operators alike in defining and executing ROE for smaller contingencies. If we don't, the next *Vincennes* disaster could show up in tomorrow's headlines -- and with an Air Force officer's picture next to that of the wreckage.

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